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SUBJECT: CORRECTED MX00608 (FORMAT ONLY) -- IFE REFORMS  
TAKE HOLD

This cable corrects format only of MX00608.

11. SUMMARY. Electoral reform legislation adopted last September included a provision requiring Congress to replace three of the Federal Electoral Institute's (IFE) members by December. Congress, however, proved unable to forge consensus around three candidates until February when it agreed to appoint each of the candidates nominated by the three major political parties represented in the Mexican Congress. Although PRD's candidate Leonardo Valdez Zurita was named IFE President, PRD leader Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO) rejected the naming of the three as a significant advance. Valdez already caused a minor stir with his decision to look into some 262,000 claims of campaign violations relating to the 2006 presidential elections. Mid-term elections for the Chamber of Deputies scheduled for 2009 should prove its first noteworthy test. End Summary.

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Recasting the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE)  
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12. The Mexican Congress passed electoral reform legislation last September. Its most important provisions included the following:

- No private funding allowed for airtime on television or radio.
- Public spending limits for presidential elections cut in half.
- Political campaigns limited to three months before the vote.
- Negative campaign messages prohibited.
- A new position of comptroller within IFE created to examine the bank accounts of the political parties.
- All nine IFE General Council members replaced on a staggered basis.

13. The provision to replace three of the IFE counselors by December generated some political controversy. PRD's AMLO had charged that the IFE had demonstrated political bias in ruling he had lost an extremely close 2006 presidential race.

PRD had made electoral reform a priority as a concession from the Calderon administration in exchange for supporting fiscal reform. Historically, IFE has proved one of the Mexican government's more respectable, independent institutions. Some within Calderon's PAN party objected to agreeing to change its membership out of concern this would overly politicize the institution. Ultimately, however, PAN

agreed to give Congress the authority to appoint nine new counselors to IFE over the next two years.

14. Congress was not able to forge consensus on the first three new appointees to the IFE by the December 13 deadline it had set for itself. However, lengthy negotiations finally produced agreement February 07, to appoint the nominee of each of three major political parties represented in the Mexican Congress. The three appointed by Congress include:

- Leonardo Valdez Zurita - Appointed to be IFE President with his term expiring October 2013. Valdez, nominated by PRD, is regarded as an expert on political and election issues. The founder of a Center focused on electoral procedures, a member of the Specialized Group on Electoral Studies at the Mexican Council of Social Sciences, and the former Executive Director of the IFE's Electoral Organization, Valdez is also a former counselor of Mexico City's Electoral Institute (IEDF). Valdez taught at el Colegio de Mexico and UAM and worked most as an investigator for the University of Guanajuato. He is an economist by profession and holds a PhD on Social Sciences from el Colegio de Mexico.

- Benito Nacif Hernandez - Appointed to be an IFE Counselor with his term expiring October 2016. Nominated by PAN, Nacif is regarded as an expert on congressional relations with the executive branch, political parties, and electoral systems.

He served prior as a coordinator of a legislative project focusing on transparency in the Congress and also as Director of the Political Studies Division at CIDE (Center of Research and Economic Studies - Centro de Investigacion y Docencias Economicas). He has authored several books including Understanding the Political Institutions and Understanding the Mexican Legislative Power. Nacif is a public

administrator by profession. He received his under graduate degree from El Colegio de Mexico and holds a PhD in Political Sciences from the Oxford University.

- Marco Antonio Baos - Appointed to be an IFE Counselor with his term expiring October 2016. Nominated by PRI, Baos is the founder of a consultancy company, DEMOS S.C, on electoral procedures. Baos served as Head of the Department of Political Studies at the Interior Secretariat (SEGOB) and taught at UNAM, ITAM and UNAP Universities. He also was one of founders of the electoral body that preceded IFE. A lawyer by profession, he received his degree from UNAM.

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Valdez Already Stirring Some Controversy  
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15. Only several days into his job as IFE President, Valdez announced February 21, that he plans to look into the some 262,000 claims of improper media spots tracing back to the 2006 presidential campaign. He has also promised to rule on the disposition of the ballots from the 2006 elections which are currently occupying significant space in IFE offices. In

September 2006, IFE acknowledged noteworthy media abuses during the 2006 electoral campaign but ruled Calderon the legitimate winner notwithstanding. It is not entirely clear what Valdez intends to accomplish by reopening this controversial subject.

16. Comment: Congress agreed to turn over membership to the IFE and appoint PRD's candidate as IFE President as part of an effort to appease PRD claims of bias tracing back to the 2006 elections. Nevertheless, PRD leader AMLO has rejected all three of the new appointees claiming that each is linked to either the PAN or PRI. Valdez's new look at charges of improper media spots relating to the 2006 elections may generate some controversy but should not call into the ultimate results of that election or challenge Calderon's legitimacy. Mid-term elections to the Mexican Chamber of Deputies scheduled for July 2009, on the other hand, should prove the first noteworthy test of the new IFE's integrity in

adjudicating Mexican election races. End comment.

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